

The Double Dipper

By William Safire

WASHINGTON — The best piece of legislation sponsored, fought for and signed by Jimmy Carter in the past year was what he liked to call "civil service reform" — snatching management power away from the redoubtable Government bureaucracy and transferring it to elected officials. The long-overdue assault on civil service abuses could only be accomplished by a Democrat and the President deserves credit.

Central to the reform was a curtailment of "double dipping," a technique of taking advantage of liberal Government pensions. In 1977, a New York Times editorial defined the term and condemned the practice: "Double dipper are members of the military who retire young, then take civilian jobs with the Federal Government and collect both a military pension and a civilian salary... Double dipping is indefensible."

One feeding at the Government trough was enough, Mr. Carter agreed; leading the new Administration in anti-double-dipping fervor was Admiral Stansfield Turner, the President's Annapolis classmate who was appointed Director of Central Intelligence.

On May 17, 1977, in that stiff patois of the lifelong technocrat, Admiral Turner sent out a personnel notice to his C.I.A. underlings: "I wish to restrict lateral input of outside retirees into positions that could be filled from within our own ranks. Therefore, effective immediately, the further hiring of annuitants is prohibited."

"Annuitants" in that lingo are people on Government pensions. The only exceptions to Turner's ukase against "lateral input" were to be double-dippers certified by C.I.A.'s Deputy Director for Administration as fitting slots calling for skills "not available from any currently serving employee" and personally approved by Admiral Turner.

When he took his new job at C.I.A., the Admiral elected to remain an active-duty naval officer. Some said this was because he wanted to become Chief of Naval Operations or Chairman of the Joint Chiefs one day; others uncharitably pointed to the unbeatable "perks" he would enjoy as an Admiral: a 14-room home with two fulltime servants in the most posh section of Washington, worth at least \$40,000 in after-tax dollars.

For whatever reason, Turner chose to stay on active duty and was a fine example of a man who practiced what he and his Commander in Chief preached: no double dipping, no taking of a retirement income from the Government when on a Government salary.

Therefore, it came as a mild shock — especially to those annuitants who hoped to hold or get jobs at the agency — when the 55-year-old Admiral let it be known last week (as quietly as he could) that he intended to retire from the Navy and begin collecting his pension effective January 10 while continuing in his present job.

In crass monetary terms, that means he is to receive \$23,393.35 per year in retirement pay in addition to his \$37,500 pay as Director of Central Intelligence, making his total draw from the Federal Government \$60,893.35, higher than any other official with the single exception of the President. (Others insist his retirement draw will be higher but I will go with the figures available from the C.I.A. spokesman who also points out that retirement means that the Admiral will have to pay for his house and servants.)

In terms of principle, this means that the man who inveighed against double-dipping when it suited his own ends will soon become the Carter Administration's foremost double-dipper.

The Admiral has good reasons for the 180 degree turn. The President is "not satisfied" with the quality of his political intelligence work, as a memo quoted here recently revealed, and prospects for naval advancement now seem bleak. Unless he retires before Jan. 10, the new Carter-sponsored legislation would make it impossible for him to double-dip. From a career and financial viewpoint, it makes sense.

But it makes no ethical sense. It is unseemly for a high-ranking member of the Administration — who has championed the principle of barring annuitants from further Federal employ — to hasten to become an annuitant in time to circumvent the President's reform. If he wants his pension, let him resign his current job as D.C.I.

The message to the simple tarheel is clear: "You cannot get away with double dipping; but the Admiral can. Take a 7 percent wage increase while the Admiral's income rises 40 percent. Rank hath its privilege; life is unfair. Is that really the message that the Carter Administration wants to send 'the little man?'"

Ironically, Admiral Turner has just fired John Blake, the veteran C.I.A. Deputy Director for Administration, who — according to Turner's stern anti-double-dipping directive — had to approve any exceptions to the annuitant policy. C.I.A. sources tell me he is to be replaced by Donald Wortman, a longtime bureaucrat of the Social Security Administration.

There is perfect symmetry: the C.I.A. is now to be administered by an expert in welfare handouts, while it is headed by the most successful double-dipper in the nation.